



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Patrick Lacefield 240-777-7939 or Jean Arthur 240-777-7934

Highlights system in “stress,” uneven maintenance, growing funding shortfalls...

COUNCIL RELEASES IN-DEPTH REPORT ON COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

A report from the Montgomery County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight released today highlighted shortcomings in efforts to inspect, maintain, and repair the County's 424 Fire & Rescue Service vehicles, citing the number of vehicles out-of-service, uneven maintenance practices and standards, and a lack of accountability.

The study stated that recent pump tests and pre-trip safety inspections indicate that current Fire & Rescue practices do not assure that all vehicles and equipment are in top operating condition and ready to perform at any time.

Vehicle readiness, according to the report, was particularly problematic with regard to aerial ladder trucks and heavy rescue squads. While ambulances and fire engines met the daily requirement for all 308 days of the period studied, aerial ladder trucks met the requirement only 78 percent of the time and heavy rescue trucks only two days out of the 308 days in question.

Additionally, the study found a significant shortfall in County funding for the purchase of Fire and Rescue apparatus. In fiscal year 2004, only \$367,000 is budgeted for a proposed \$7.2 million need. By the end of next year, the gap could grow to close to \$18 million.

“While parts of our system are working well, this study shows that our Fire and Rescue Service is ‘stressed’ by ongoing repair and maintenance

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problems,” said Karen Orlansky, director of the Office of Legislative Oversight. “The good news is that there is consensus on the need to improve our system.”

Among the study’s recommendations were:

- Create a multi-year plan to improve Fire & Rescue management practices.
- Implement system-wide standards for maintenance and performance.
- Establish an Apparatus Officer with the responsibility and authority to lead planning and implementation of improvements.
- Build on successful and innovative maintenance practices by some local Fire & Rescue units.
- Establish by law that vehicle maintenance is essential to effective Fire & Rescue operations.

“Montgomery County residents deserve the very best we can give them in our Fire and Rescue Service – right now, it’s not clear who is responsible for maintenance,” said Councilmember Michael Knapp, lead Councilmember for Fire & Rescue and chief sponsor of legislation that would change the County’s Service to more clearly define lines of authority and responsibility.

“Over the past 25 years, we’ve had ten reports with recommendations to improve our maintenance. Very few were implemented. This report shows we can’t wait any longer.”

“I’m very concerned with how little we are spending to replace Fire & Rescue vehicles,” said Councilmember Phil Andrews, chair of the Council’s Public Safety Committee. “In the current year, we are funding less than six percent of our fire vehicle replacement needs. Our fleet is aging and we are underfunding core public safety services. That’s got to change.”

The full text of the Office of Legislative Oversight Report is available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council.

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